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A RECENTLY DISCOVERED STONE SCULPTURE IN ÖLAND, SWEDEN

By GEORGE T. FLOM

UNTIL a few years ago no examples of rock-tracings or like sculpturings had been found in the Baltic islands of Sweden. However, the discovery in 1910 of an elaborate tracing of cups, ships, sandals, and axes, at Hågvide, Lärbro Parish, Gothland, and of a sculptured stone on the Island of Öland in 1916 now gives these two island provinces also one each. Both finds are exceedingly interesting and in some points unusual. The following observations upon that of Öland are here offered as a small contribution to the vexed question of the meaning of the rock-tracings.

The carved stone is located on the Klinta Farm, No. 3, in Smedby Parish, southern Öland; when found it lay with the flat side down, and almost wholly covered with earth, just inside a stone wall separating the farm from the highway.¹ The somewhat raised ground inside the wall was examined and an excavation made by T. J. Arne in 1917, who found that it represented what was left of a grave about 18 m. in diameter, a portion of the grave having been cut away on the occasion of the building of the highway. Of the contents of the grave I shall mention only the two skeletons. Arne dates the grave and the incised stone as belonging to the second period of the Bronze Age, hence the 16th-15th centuries B. C.²

The stone, which is here reproduced as Fig. 51, is a trapezoidal-triangular granite boulder 1, 16 m. tall, 50 cm. thick, 68 cm. broad at the base, and 45 at the top.³ One of the narrow sides together with the slanting base and also the top are compactly covered with small, round cup-depressions, 150 in all. The broad

¹ It is described by T. J. Arne in an article entitled "Ölands första kända bronsåldersristning," in *Fornvännen*, 1917, pp. 196-201.

² L. c., p. 200.

³ L. c., p. 198.

side contains figures as follows: at the top, three large concentric circles with a central hollow; at the left of this, four cups arranged in quadrangular form; at the center, what appears to be a horse, and below that, more deeply incised, a ship extending across the whole stone; at the base two schematicised horses and a trident-like figure. The ship shows a high prow and high stern; there are crew-strokes indicating seven rowers, whose heads are indicated by very small cups exactly as are those of the Kivik grave near Simrishamn, Skåne, and its horse figures are the same as on the latter and on some Norwegian tracings. It is supposed that the

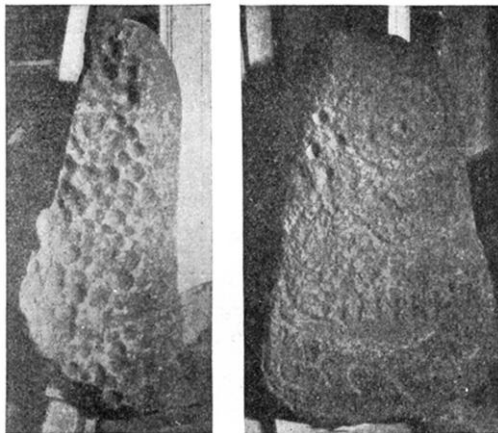


FIG. 51.—Sculptured stone, Smedby Parish, Öland, Sweden. Side and front views.

massive block cannot have occupied a place in the cist, but stood on the grave as a monument, as in the case of the Villfara stone of southeastern Skåne.⁴

There are several interesting features about this stone. While it does not necessarily follow from the character of the configuration on the two carved sides, that the cups were cut later than the sun-emblem and the other figures on the broad and smoother side, as Arne is inclined to think, that is a possibility. The monument, then, was originally set up with its sun-symbol carving of concentric circles as the principal figure, and with the

⁴ Noted by Arne, *l. c.*, p. 200. The weight of the stone is over a ton.

horses and the ship at the base. The four cups at the top are evidently arranged to form a square figure, the shape here being due to the narrowness of the space where the figure is placed. We have here, then, evidently one form of the four-spoked wheel-symbol, hence a second sun-symbol by the side of that of the concentric rings and central cup. But if the two figures at the top are connected with the sun-cult, the two at the base and nearest the grave proper, as the house of the dead, that is, the horse and the ship, would seem to be connected with the death-cult. There were two skeletons in the grave; but as the grave had been partly destroyed before, we cannot say whether the number of each group of symbols originally was determined by the number of bodies buried there (the figure in the center, which is now very hard to make out, Arne thinks may possibly represent two figures). And in this case what does the trident represent?

The compactness of the cups and the fact that they are carved in the same way at the top are not without interest. In this latter feature we are reminded of such a position of numerous cups on one of the few cupped stones found in Germany, namely one near Meissen.⁵ But here the cups are arranged in three concentric curved rows. On the Öland stone there is no such arrangement. The closeness with which the cups have been placed is unusual; I cannot recall anywhere a similar case in the north.⁶ On the Tuna stone No. 3,⁷ which contains 120 cup-hollows, there are uncarved spaces,⁸ and likewise on the Borreby stone.⁹ On the latter some are very large, others of varying size, many are shallow, some much deeper; they would seem to have been applied

⁵ This cupped stone is shown as Fig. 19 in *Observations on Cup-shaped and Other Lapidarian Sculptures in the Old World and in America*, by Charles Rau, Washington, D. C., 1881.

⁶ Cf., however, the cup-and-ring carved ball from Dunfermline, Scotland, pictured on plate 1 in vol. XI of the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*. The figures on the rock-sculptures near Lac de Merveilles, Italy, are made by compact cuppings.—G. de Mortillet, *Formation de la Nation Française*, Paris, 1897, pp. 176–177.

⁷ Sörmland, Sweden.

⁸ First published on p. 192 of vol. x of *Svenska Fornminnesföreningens Tidskrift*. Also shown in *Bidrag till Sörmlands Kulturhistoria*, xiv, p. 28.

⁹ Illustrated in *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed*, 1917, p. 88.

by different persons and may represent a long period of time. This is precisely what Arne supposes for the cup-marked side of the Öland stone. He says of the cups, "their irregular position makes it likely that they were not cut all at the same time, but during a long period of time, one for every occasion, when a magic ceremony was carried out at the grave." It is clear that cups situated, as here and often elsewhere, on the side of a stone in a grave or in the open cannot have been receptacles of food for the dead, and so connected with some sacrificial ceremony. But they may, to be sure, be connected with some magic rite in which the cups were rubbed with fat or blood as the author supposes, calling in evidence this practice from the last two centuries.¹⁰

The cups on the Öland stone have been carved so close together as to present a compact body of cups covering the whole surface of this one side, with no vacant space left anywhere on it. In many parts they do actually present, apparently, arrangements of rows, squares, and round groups; but this is clearly accidental and not with purpose. They present this appearance, and it has been possible to get the surface covered so completely, because, after placing the first cup on one side or at the top, each new cup has been placed close to it at the side or immediately above or below. It is possible that the whole body of cups, the cupped surface in its entirety, was cut before the burial, or at any rate at the same time that the figures on the broad side were cut.¹¹ In either case, whether cut before or one by one in connection with later magic ceremonies, it is strange that the cups should all have been placed on this side. May the reason be that the monument, as originally placed, or intended afterwards to be placed, stood so that the two carved sides faced the south (or south and east)? Then the reason why the cups were all cut on

¹⁰ In other regions other ideas and practices are associated with the cupped stones. The problem is a difficult one, but it is possible that certain practices of later times are survivals of Bronze Age rites connected with the cup. The cup-mark is found first in the dolmens of the Neolithic Age. See also above, note 3.

¹¹ It has been proved in many places that the sculptured figures have been applied before the planting of the stone in the grave. This is the case with the Landerslev stone, Sealand, Denmark, one stone in the dolmen of Keriaval, Locmariaquer, Brittany, France, and some of those in the New Grange tumulus, County Meath, Ireland.

the same side might be that the efficacy of such a supposed magic ceremony was conditioned upon the presence of the sun's rays in the cup during the ceremony.

One more observation suggests itself. While a few cups run over into one another, forming oblong bowls (lower left-hand side), and two or three at the top are larger than the rest, the great majority are round and of uniform size, and apparently of uniform depth also. Now incised depressions are often not round; that is, in a body of incised figures containing cups, the cups are not always round. But they are everywhere prevailing round; it is the same in all countries. And the farther back we follow the cup-markings the more uniformly do we find them to be round. The roundness of the cup has a symbolic significance.

What is the original meaning of the cup in the rock-tracings? The purpose of the cup may have changed somewhat in the course of its history from the period of the dolmens to the close of the Bronze Age, and it may, therefore, have come to assume a place in practices with which it was not originally connected. But it is everywhere found together with some form of ancient sun-worship among Indo-European peoples (and elsewhere). And throughout this period of 2000 years or more in the Scandinavian North, and within the same period of time in England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Spain, Switzerland, India—to name only the countries where they are most abundant—in very considerable measure they are associated with ancient sepulture, even though not everywhere. And when so found the cups are seen also to be associated with one or more other figures that are well-recognized as sun-symbols. Further, as we follow these various sun-symbols back to the earliest graves, we find that the wheel is the oldest, either as a wheel of four spokes, or as a wheel without spokes, the so-called circle or ring. Herewith the dolmen builders of the New Stone Age of the North, 2500 B.C. and before, symbolized the roundness and the movement of the sun; and they thought of it as a disc, or a circle; but they also thought of it as a ball, and of course often as a flaming ball. The cup is the smallest of the figures. But there may be other reasons why in many places it appears massed on the sculptured surfaces. What I would like

especially to emphasize in this connection, however, is that it also often appears in isolation, or with but one or two other cups, or with one or two other sun-symbols. As an example I give here as

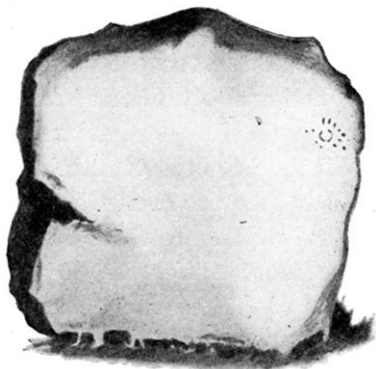


FIG. 52.—Stone d, Cairn V, from Loughcrew, County Meath, Ireland.

Fig. 52 an illustration of Stone d, Cairn V, from the tumulus at Loughcrew, County Meath, Ireland, showing the rayed circle, the symbol of the radiant sun; there is no other figure. Compare,

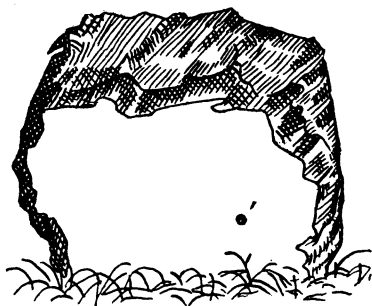


FIG. 53.—Stone from a cist at Culbirnie, Inverness-shire, Scotland.

then, Fig. 53, which is of a cupped stone from a stone-cist of Culbirnie, near Beaulie, Inverness, Scotland. There is the single figure of a cup-depression, and practically nothing else.

I submit that the cup, which is older than any of the other round sun-symbols—ring, four-spoked wheel, spiral—is the earliest of all sun-symbols; that when our Indo-European ancestors first sculptured in stone the image of the sun in connection with

some practice in their worship, they carved the hemispherical cup. Later they began also to cut it in contour—and we have the ring or circle. The four-spoked wheel comes last of the three; it represents a more advanced stage of culture, presupposing, as it undoubtedly does, the analogy to the four-spoked wheel of the vehicles of the Neolithic Age. If the above be correct, that the cup is originally the symbol of the sun, it would, possibly, have been suggested especially by the ball of the sun as it rises and sets. Herein lies, no doubt, the reason for the connection of the cup with burial and the death-cult, with which it is everywhere associated in its earliest appearance among Indo-European peoples, and with which it is intimately associated also in all its later history.

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